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A MESSAGE

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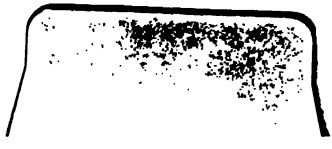

A MESSAGE.

AN ARROW FROM

A BOW DRAWN AT A VENTURE.

"I shot an arrow into the air,
It fell—I knew not where."

LONDON:
WILLIAM HUNT AND COMPANY,
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1870.

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A MESSAGE TO MY FRIENDS.

AN ARROW FROM A BOW DRAWN AT A VENTURE.

"I shot an arrow into the air,
It fell—I knew not where."

DO you ever listen for the postman's knock as he goes from house to house, little recking of the news he is taking to each one: sowing seeds of bitter sorrow here, and sweet joy there; bearing messages most trivial, or most important,—messages of life or death?

"No, not I: I care for nobody, and nobody cares for me. I don't often trouble the postman."

Well, but it is pleasant sometimes to get a letter from a friend: it makes you feel you are not quite forgotten, not quite alone in the world. And now I wish you to consider this as a letter from a sincere friend and well wisher, with very

important news in it: tidings of life and death, gathered from a letter sent long ago by a tender loving Father to wayward disobedient children. They had wandered away from the love and allegiance they owed Him in return for the love and the benefits lavished on them, into the "far country" of doubt and darkness and sin; but He *could* not (because of the yearning love in His heart), He could not let them stay there, without a message of love, *beseeching* them to return. I wish this to be a little reminder to you of things which you knew before.

In the days of the Judges, when the people of Israel being oppressed by the surrounding heathen nations, cried out unto the Lord, He heard them, and from time to time raised up a deliverer. Such an one was Ehud, who was raised up after they had served the king of Moab eighteen years. For the Lord had "strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel, because they had done evil in the sight of the Lord." (Jud. iii. 12.) Ehud approached the oppressor apparently with a present; but with a determined purpose to deliver his people from the oppression under which they groaned. He declared "I

have a secret errand unto thee, O king: I have a message from God unto thee." It must be delivered quietly, to himself alone. That message was one of death.

Many years afterwards we have another picture brought before us. A messenger in haste to deliver his message, appears suddenly before a little band, and with the words, "I have an errand to thee," beckons one of the company away to a quiet hearing of his message. This time the messenger brought tidings of a kingdom, and of work to be done for God. When Jehu returned to his companions they inquired wherefore the messenger came. He replied, "Ye know the man and his communication." (2 Kings ix. 5.)

And now I come to each one of you with the words, "I have a message from God unto thee:" and I think you know the purport of the communication. I tell you that "the wages of sin is death;" but I tell you also that "the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." I tell you also of a kingdom far grander and more enduring than of earth: of your high destiny; of work to be done for God. Man's

chief end is to "glorify God and to enjoy Him for ever." Do you mean it shall be yours? Is it true for you that, "called with a holy calling," "the kingdom of God is within you;" that "ye are a royal priesthood, called out of darkness into His marvellous light, translated into the kingdom of His dear Son," because you can say He hath "loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father"?

It has pleased God to lay me aside from active work among you; yet I do not forget you. I long earnestly that you may all know the secret of true happiness. I pray often that we may meet in Heaven. I wish that those who are wasting their lives in folly and sin may wake up to the value of time, the worth of a soul, the perishing nature of all the things we see, and the certainty of unseen realities which we hear about. I desire that those who are learning in Christ's school may go on unto perfection; taught of the Spirit to grow in grace and holiness of life, and in the knowledge of, and likeness to Jesus. That those who are weak and troubled *in body* or mind may prove that there is "grace

to help in every time of need;" and that all of us who have held intercourse together, may, in our different callings and homes be living for God; so living, that we may honestly, truthfully, rejoicingly say, "To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

And so, dear friends, as you lie so much on my heart, I cannot help but send you a few words to remind you of words you have heard often before. Perhaps the careless ones among you will toss this aside and say, "Oh, another sermon: I don't want to hear it. I don't do anybody any harm; why can't I be left alone to enjoy myself."

Well now, answer the question *honestly,—Do you enjoy yourself?* When you seem most light hearted, most careless to those around, does not some thought of the future come sometimes to startle you, and you puff at your pipe all the harder, and you laugh all the louder, and you drink all the deeper, to stifle the voice of conscience and the whisper of the Spirit?

One day I was sent for to a young man lying on what seemed to be his death bed. He looked frightened, as he afterwards admitted he was,

for he knew his life would not bear the scrutiny of an All-seeing Eye. The tears rolled down his cheeks, as trembling with weakness of body and fearfulness of mind, he shrank from what must come after death, while I told him "concerning the faith in Christ, and reasoned of righteousness, temperance and judgment to come," in as simple words as I could, as I found him so utterly ignorant of the way of salvation. I prayed and wept with him, and hoped that if his life was spared he might prove that his sickness had been the means of health to his soul.

I would rather not think of him now, except to pray for him, so sad is my heart concerning him. God gave him back his health and strength in a wonderful manner; but instead of using them for Him, his good resolutions vanished all too quickly, and it is happened unto him, according to the true proverb, "The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire." (2 Peter ii. 22.) Has it not often happened to you to feel, as he expressed it, "I've often said to myself, It won't do to go on in this way; I'm blowed if I won't turn over a new leaf"? but

has the leaf been turned over? or if it has, in the breaking off a few bad habits, and outwardly reforming what made others ashamed of you, is that enough? have you so made your peace with God?

How is it that some of you have told me after a magnificent storm, "I *was* frightened"? but that it reminded you of God, and you do not like to think of Him, because you know enough of your own hearts and lives, and enough of Him to make you feel "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God," for "our God is a consuming fire."

We know a storm is produced by natural causes; but there is something solemnizing in the grandeur of the deep roll of the thunder, which is as it were the voice of God, and makes us listen, whether we will or no; something startling in the dazzling blaze of the lightning, which is as it were a gleam from the brightness surrounding His throne who "dwelleth in light that no man can approach unto," reminding us of the Saviour's words, "So shall the coming of the Son of Man be."

"Hear attentively the noise of His voice, and the sound that goeth out of His mouth. He

directeth it under the whole heaven, and His lightning unto the ends of the earth. After it a voice roareth : He thundereth with the voice of His excellency; and He will not slay them when His voice is heard. God thundereth marvellously with His voice ; great things doeth He, which we cannot comprehend. Hearken unto this : stand still, and consider the wondrous works of God." (Job. xxxvii. 2—5, 14.) The voice of God may come in a different tone, and bear a different message to each heart; and if the thunder is His voice to you, thank Him for it, and listen to what it says.

Why are you afraid? Though the elements roar and are troubled, God sitteth above the waterfloods ruling the storm; and those who love the Lord know that "His children shall have a place of refuge." They can say of a storm in nature, or a figurative storm of trouble which threatens to crush all the joy out of life, or of wrath against sin,—

"The storm may roar around me,
My heart may low be laid;
But God is round about me,
I cannot be dismayed,"—

for they know this is a true word,—"Thou hast been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall." (Isai. xxv. 4.) And having cried out,—

> "Hide me, oh, my Saviour, hide,
> Till the storm of life is past!
> Safe into the haven guide;
> Oh, receive my soul at last!"—

they experience the "perfect peace" in which God keeps those whose minds are *stayed* on Him.

But you are afraid because you have not yet "fled for refuge to the hope set before us;" and you put off doing so, because you think there is time enough yet; and another and another storm reminds you of your broken resolutions, your forgotten intentions, and as the days pass by it is harder work than ever to begin "to seek the Lord."

Now in a storm the first instinct is to run for shelter; and sometimes refuge is taken under a tree, which in a few moments may be struck by lightning and fall crashing to the ground;—

the refuge gone, and death brought to those who sought for safety. But, oh, think what it will be when the last great storm comes, when "the elements shall melt with fervent heat," when the flash of light from the presence of the Lord shall burn up your disguises, and shrivel up the last of your good resolutions, and blast the last refuges of lies,—*then* to find yourselves exposed to that pitiless storm! "Who may abide the day of His coming? and who shall stand when He appeareth?" It will be in vain then to cry "to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of His wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand?"

There is something inexpressibly terrible in those words, "*the wrath of the Lamb.*" A lamb is a gentle, innocent creature, and taken as an emblem of gentleness. In proportion as a person is generally gentle and sweet spoken, we are the more moved when we see visible signs of anger; we are quite sure there must have been some terrible exciting cause to produce *such a change.*

Once only during His lifetime on earth we read of the Saviour "looking round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their heart," in that they would not believe,—that they would not receive the blessing He was waiting to bestow. He was *then*, and is *now*, gentle, tender, and full of compassion. We read of Him as "brought as a lamb to the slaughter." John the Baptist's testimony concerning Him was, "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world;" and hearing him speak, two of his disciples followed Jesus. Peter writes, "Ye were redeemed with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot;" and as explained by the Epistle to the Hebrews, the morning and evening sacrifice of an unblemished lamb, and all the types and shadows of the Levitical law pointed to the need of cleansing, and the only way of acceptance with God. The Apostle John, who was allowed to see wonderful things in vision, records that he saw a lamb as it had been slain: Jesus still pleading for sinners; Jesus still "able to save," because of the efficacy of the great work of redemption that He worked

out. But by and by this picture will be changed, and that terrible one will be seen,—the gentle, compassionate Saviour executing vengeance on those who refused the offers of His love, who said in their lives, if not by their lips, "We will not have this Man to reign over us." "When God arises to shake terribly the earth," none can escape the wrath of the Lamb but those who have cried, "Lead me to the rock that is higher than I," who are hidden in the cleft of that rock, whose names are in the Book of Life, who have laid their sins on the head of the Lamb to be borne away into the land of forgetfulness.

Have you so cried out? are you thus hidden? are your names in the muster roll of heaven? and if not, *why not?* It won't be God's fault if you are not saved. *It will be your own, and you know it.* Sometimes we have a sort of satisfaction in being able to share the blame of any misfortune or fault with another, or in casting it all on some one else; but here it will be impossible. If we are lost, the fault, the blame will be all our own. A rejected Saviour, a despised Gospel, a neglected way of salvation

will witness to our confusion. Then why delay making sure work for eternity? "Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him." If you know the love of the Lamb *now*, you need not fear the wrath of the Lamb *then*.

Many years ago a weary-hearted man was alone in a desert place. He had fled away from his fellows, and wished in himself that he might die. He had been busy, and he was tired. He had done a great work for God, and the reaction came; and, man of strong faith as he was, very bold, "very jealous for the Lord of hosts," his faith quailed before the wicked woman Jezebel's threat that she would have his life, and he besought God to take it from him. But God had compassion on His servant. His work was not done: God would strengthen and help him on his way. And presently there came a display of God's power. A great strong wind, and an earthquake, and a fire, rending the mountains and breaking the rocks, might have made him tremble at the nearness and power of God; but this time the Lord was not in these to speak

to Elijah's heart. And after these "a still small voice." And when Elijah heard that he came forth to listen and commune with God. (1 Kings xix.)

Have you ever heard it,—the whisper of the Spirit,—the voice of conscience? Has never a sickness laid you low,—the death of a friend troubled you? Do you say, If I knew God was going to speak to me I would listen, for I'd as lieve be fit to go to heaven? Ah, He speaks very often; but He often has to say, "I called, and ye refused. How long will ye make your necks stiff, and refuse to hearken?" Listen: is He speaking now? Yes, by these very words you are reading is He once more pleading with you; "as though God did *beseech* you by us" (strange, strong words: the great God stooping to *beseech* sinners to accept mercy!), "be ye reconciled to God." I beseech you therefore no longer to fly in the face of God,—for it is neither more nor less than this, when you will choose your own way here, and expect God to break His word: "Them that honour Me I will honour, and they that despise Me shall be *lightly esteemed*." (1 Sam. ii. 30.)

I saw several that I knew idling about one Sunday evening. I pleaded with them to go to church with me; but all the answer I could get was, "Not to-night." "They all with one consent began to make excuse." I could not help sadly repeating these words, and saying they were true more than eighteen hundred years ago, and they are true still. I must copy for you some strong words of pleading I lately read: "In God's own name, in the name of Jesus who bled for you, and of the Spirit whose light, and strength, and comfort are freely promised to you, I invite you, I entreat you, cast away excuses! Delay no longer! 'Escape for thy life!' Labour, strive to enter in! Take heed lest, if your place in God's house on earth be longer empty, your place in heaven be empty for ever. Yet there is room, —room for you, room in the Church on earth, room in a Father's heart, and a Saviour's love. Dear brother, come. 'Whosoever will, let him come.' So shall not your Christian baptism, nor the weekly Sabbath bells, nor open churches, nor anxious ministers, nor a neglected Bible, nor the table of the Lord forsaken, nor God's

great salvation in the Gospel of Jesus Christ,—witness against you in your coming day of account."

One day when I was talking to a man about getting to heaven, I asked him as to his prospects, and the way he was going. He said he did not want to go to hell: he should like to go to heaven; but, he added, in a light-hearted careless way to turn off the subject, he thought he must take the middle way. Now the Lord Jesus expressly tells us that there is no middle way. There are but two main roads which can be travelled on in the journey of life. "Strait (or narrow) is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth to life; and wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction." I grant you there may *seem* to be some bye-ways, but you will find them all leading back shortly into the broad high road. Now which road are you travelling?

There are but two classes of people in the world, as we are told by those solemn words of Christ, "He that is not with Me is against Me." A nation, or a man may say, when *watching* a play or a fight, I will side with

neither: I will, at any rate, wait to see which way the game will go. At the moment that I am writing there is an alarm of war: the trumpet has sounded to arms, and eager soldiers are hastening to take their place in the battle. The peace of Europe has been broken, and we hold our breath, in listening and expecting attitude, shuddering to think what the next news may be. In England there has been a proclamation of neutrality: God grant we may be kept aloof from the conflict. But there is no such thing as *neutrality* in the warfare of life. Which side are you for then?—Christ's? fighting manfully, enduring hardness as a good soldier, with many a dint, may be, in your armour, much use for your sword and shield, but with the certainty of victory and a glorious rest at the end of the fight. Or the devil's?—*perhaps* an easy swing through life, but with the certainty of shame and defeat at the end.

There is a verse which tells us that condemnation is ours, if we do not love God; which I have often pointed out to you (Ps. ix. 17): "The wicked shall be turned into hell." Now if the verse stopped there, we might say, as too many

do, Then I'm all right: I am not wicked, I never do anything wrong, I shall have a good chance for heaven! But it does not,—it goes on to tear down our self-conceit: "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the people that forget God." And *who* can plead, *Not guilty,* when asked as to the second part of the text? How often are we convicted of forgetfulness; though the words slip but lightly, too lightly, over our lips,—I forgot,—I did not think. Do we not forget God? Has He not often to write of us as of those of old, "My people hath forgotten Me days without number." Well may we hide ourselves and shrink back ashamed, blushing to lift up our face before Him, because "our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up into the heavens" (Ezra ix. 6), and cry, "keep this ever in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of Thy people, and prepare their heart unto Thee." (1 Chron. xxix. 18.)

And now I must say a few words to those who are wishing to do better: hoping God will have mercy on them. Take heed that you are *in earnest,* that you are honest and whole-hearted,

and you need have no fear as to the truth of God's Word. Some are trying to make themselves better; but if we go on that way for ever we shall be no nearer heaven, and our hopes that God will have mercy will be disappointed. "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord:" but it is utterly out of our power to make an acceptable holiness ourselves.

> "If you tarry till you're better
> You will never come at all."

God has made a way of escape, has opened a way of access to the throne of grace, and to the mansions of glory; and He will have us take His way. We often see people perishing because there is but *one* way of escape from some great danger, as by fire or shipwreck; and they fear to take a leap, or wait to see if they cannot find some other way than that pointed out; and while they hesitate the moment that would have saved them is gone. When any great sight, or audience of the Queen is going on, we see every one conforming to a rule laid down, and going in the appointed way. We should be surprised if they did not; and we

should think it only just and fair that any who chose to go in a wrong way, at a wrong time, not suitably dressed, or without a ticket, should be turned back. Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life, no man cometh unto the Father but by Me," and He tells us that something very sad will happen to a great many people who wished to go to heaven, and thought they were getting ready for it. The door of heaven will be shut against those who do not come in God's way. To those who have been trying to make themselves better, thinking they could make a fair enough show to pass muster, He will say, "I never knew you." Will you then leave off priding yourselves on your good behaviour (as some of you perhaps can honestly do, only looking at what man thinks of you), or on your good wishes, and ask Him to show you what you must do to win Heaven.

A thing may look all very well at a distance but how will it bear the close inspection of a critical eye,—how will it look in a very strong light or under a microscope? Have you ever examined anything through a powerful micro-*scope?* You concentrate the light, and arrange

the glass, and put under it a fly's foot, or wing, or eye, or a piece of down from a butterfly's wing, and you say, How beautiful: I never could have thought such lovely feathers, or colours, or mechanism could be in that insignificant little thing! You put under the glass a piece of the most delicately fine and beautiful muslin or lacework that can possibly be manufactured: it cost a great deal of money, and looked very well before it was magnified; but you exclaim, This can't be what I was looking at just now: such a course ugly piece, with such flaws and imperfections in it! Everything of God's workmanship that is looked at through a microscope, excites our wonder and admiration, while with everything of man's we find great fault. And so it is with our works and efforts for fitness for heaven: we may work well, and weave a fine garment of good works and resolutions, of morality and fair show, to man's eye and our own satisfaction, but it won't stand the test of the blaze of light from God's presence, and glaring flaws and imperfections and holes are to be seen. So Adam and Eve's self-made coverings of fig leaves proved insufficient when God

came near with the question, "Adam, where art thou?" But the most critical eye, even an All-seeing One, fails to discover one flaw in the righteousness and holiness of those who are hidden in Christ, and made holy by His Holy Spirit. For He says, when looking on those who believe in, and love Him, "Thy beauty was perfect through my comeliness which I put upon thee;" and He will present them "faultless before the throne of His glory, without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing."

There are some of you who are walking in light, rejoicing in the liberty wherewith Christ makes free, and I want you all to come to the light, and to be able to "rejoice in the Lord." "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed;" and a blessed thing it is to be living for Christ, and to know what this means, "Christ in you the hope of glory."

But you have difficulties, and often want the word of encouragement; you have but to open your Bible and find it. It has been said, "We do not walk to heaven in easy slippers on velvet lawns." But if the way be rough and difficult *shoes are* provided for us; a guide is appointed.

"Your shoes shall be iron and brass" (that shows there are hard roads, and tough climbing before us), "Your feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace;" the great God Himself says, "I will guide thee with Mine eye;" and He makes the road so plain to a willing soul, that "the wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein." Take comfort from the study of your Bibles in seeing how tenderly God speaks to us, how gently He deals with us, —knowing our frame, remembering that we are dust. And if the old wound breaks out afresh, and we are grieved at finding some bad habit we had thought was conquered, only waiting the opportunity to assert its power again, it is but a reason why we should always keep within sight of the Great Physician, "who," as one truly said of Him, "never had an incurable patient yet." There is no earthly cure for soul-sickness. He says, "Thy wound is incurable;" but He also says, "I am the Lord that healeth thee;" and He never turned a deaf ear to the cry, "Heal me, and I shall be healed. Heal me, for I am weak."

Some of the chapters of the Gospels read like

a royal progress. The Lord of life and glory, the King of heaven and earth, was not however clad in royal robes, surrounded with regal pomp, and attended with outward splendour. He Himself said, "My kingdom is not of this world," —adding for our encouragement, "The kingdom of God is within you." A few followers only traversed the land with Him, though sometimes we hear of vast crowds attracted by the flashing forth of his power. But wherever He went, He left a gleam of light: giving sight to blind eyes, hearing to deaf ears, speech to dumb lips, power to palsied limbs, healing to unclean lepers, life to dead bodies,—and, better still, life, health, joy,—to dead, weary, sorrowful souls. Again and again we read, "He healed all that had need of healing:" "He went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil." "As many as touched Him were made whole." And so it is now: "He fainteth not neither is weary." Though His feet tread not visibly this earth, we have but to say, "Lord, I am oppressed, undertake for me." "If I may but touch the hem of His garment I shall be perfectly *whole;*" and we shall find "the power

of the Lord," still "present to heal," and shall joyfully say, with the blind man of old, "One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see."

But you can't all say this. Some are sadly saying, "I wish I could! I wish I knew I was *sure* of heaven: I wish I could be good. I want to love Jesus; sometimes I think I do love Him a little, but I'm so wicked." We all feel disposed sometimes to doubt if a piece of news is not too good to be true (see Gen. xlv. 25—28), especially if we are told of some good fortune to ourselves, which we know we do not deserve. But we are happier if we can thankfully trust the friend who tells it to us. Now, dear friends, we have to trust one another in the daily affairs of life, though we know we all fail sometimes, from various causes, to be as good as our word. Shall not we trust Him who says, "I am the Lord, *I change not*, therefore ye are not consumed"? Shall we not trust Him, of whom it is written, "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever"? Doubts are like fogs,—all earthborn; but the fogs often hide the sun from us; and doubts and fears hide the Sun of

Righteousness. Satan likes to make us doubt: he keeps many a soul in misery in Doubting Castle, if he can't keep them out of the kingdom any other way. Do not falter; run the race, looking unto Jesus, and you will soon get into a clearer atmosphere, and breathe purer air. One has said, "For every look at yourself take ten looks at Christ." If we look ever at ourselves there is enough to make us despair; but if we "consider Christ Jesus," then we may go on our way rejoicing. You know if you try to look at the sun for a few minutes, when you turn away your eyes they retain the brightness, and you will see suns everywhere. So look up to Jesus until your eye gets filled with His image, and you will not be able, as you will not wish, to see anything but Christ. "Men see not the bright light in the cloud," because they don't look for it; and remember, "Behind the cloud is the sun still shining." Sometimes indeed it is the cloud of our sins that separates between us and our God, but we need not let that cloud stay to shut the light and joy out of our lives. We need not, when the word is, "I *am He that* blotteth out thy transgressions for

mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins. I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee." (Is. xliii. 25; xliv. 22.) Have you never watched the clouds flying before the wind, or on a very cloudy morning said, When the sun gets well up it will get the better of the clouds? and by-and-bye the clouds have all dispersed, and there is hardly one flecking the beautiful clear blue sky.

"Look up, faint heart: look up and smile,
Remember this is the little while;
Wait but a few fast fleeting days,
And thy life shall be one breath of praise—
Where no days are dark and dreary."

"Who is there among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of His servant, that walketh in darkness and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God." (Is. l. 10.)

"Then do not be discouraged,
For Jesus is your Friend:
He will give grace to conquer,
And keep you to the end."

We may have to cry out, "Oh, our God, wilt not Thou judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon Thee." (2 Chron. xx. 12.) Lord, it is nothing with Thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power: help us, O Lord our God; for we rest on Thee, and in Thy name we go against this multitude. O Lord, Thou art our God; let not man prevail against Thee." (2 Chron. xiv. 11.) But this is true: "They that stumbled are girded with strength" (1 Sam. ii. 4); and it will be true for us, if we cry out, "Hold up my goings in Thy paths, that my footsteps slip not." (Ps. xvii. 5.)

"Thus saith the Lord unto you, Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not your's, but God's. Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of God with you: fear not, nor be dismayed; to-morrow go out against them: for the Lord will be with you," was the encouraging message *from* God, when the king Jehoshaphat cried

out to Him in his hour of need. (2 Chron. xx. 15, 17.) No, we could not fight at all, save for the strength infused by this thought, "*The battle is not yours, but God's.*" We must remember, if we are enabled to gain the least victory over a sin or bad habit, that "power belongeth unto God." Our song must be now, "Thanks be to God which giveth us the victory, through Jesus Christ our Lord," and by-and-bye we shall joyfully sing, "More than conquerors through Him that loved us," for "Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory." We have giant foes, but we may go forth unhesitatingly with David's words: "I come in the name of the Lord of Hosts. The Lord will deliver me" (1 Sam. xvii. 45, 47), listening to the voice of the Captain of our salvation. He has fought the battle, and knows the test and strain to us; but He gained the victory, and left a wounded vanquished foe on the field (though one that will often raise his head to hurl fiery darts, and harass the soldier of the Cross.) Joshua said, and our Jesus says, "Come near and put your feet upon the necks of these (conquered) kings.

Fear not nor be dismayed, be strong and of good courage, for thus shall the Lord do to all your enemies against whom ye fight" (Jos. x. 24, 25); and Paul's confidence is to be ours: "And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto His heavenly kingdom" (2 Tim. iv. 18): for God's reassuring word is, "They shall fight against thee; but they shall not prevail against thee; for I am with thee, saith the Lord, to deliver thee." (Jer. i. 19.)

Don't let us dishonour God then by doubting His love, and His power, and His willingness to save in the first instance, and "to make all grace abound toward" us, to sustain the life He has given, and to finish the work He has begun. To the poor man who came with the words, "Lord, if thou *wilt*, thou canst make me clean," the gracious answer was given, "I will: be thou clean." (Matt. viii. 2, 3.) "Only believe." "All things are possible to him that believeth," was the word of encouragement to one who cried, "If thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us;" whereupon "he said with tears, Lord, I believe: help thou mine unbelief."

(Mark v. 36; ix. 22—24.) And if you can come no other way, you can come with these longing tears and cries, saying, "Lord, increase our faith," and you shall find an answer of peace; for God says, "I know the thoughts that I think toward you, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you an expected end." (Jer. xxix. 11.) And how shall not your heavenly Father give good things to them that ask Him? "The kingdom of God is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost." "The fruit of the Spirit is joy." I want you then to "rejoice in the Lord." A spirit burdened with a sense of sin, or one that is excusing some sin because it is a little one, cannot rejoice. But one that has listened to the word, "Look unto Me and be ye saved all the ends of the earth;" who has been taught by the Holy Spirit that the Lord Jesus "by His one offering of Himself, once offered, has made a full, perfect, and sufficient satisfaction for the sins of the whole world," may rejoice in hope of the glory of God, with joy unspeakable and full of glory. The Lord Jesus says, "I, if I be lifted up will draw all men unto Me;" and if the love of Christ constrains us

there will be no hiding or excusing of sin, but a clearing of ourselves "a new principle within," implanted by the Holy Spirit—

> "Of jealous godly fear,
> A sensibility of sin,
> A pain to feel it near."

"If any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." (2 Cor. v. 17.)

"Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity." (2 Tim. ii. 19.) Comfort yourselves, you who are in earnest, with this verse, as an assurance and as a test. A heart that has been softened to yield to the love of Christ *must* depart from iniquity: it *must* hate sin. By reason of the change that has come over it, it cannot help doing so: it *must* flee from temptation, and avoid occasion of sin; it cannot *willingly* give one hand to Christ, and one to the world, or the devil. And then there is the comfort in all our struggles: "The Lord knoweth them that are

His." He sees the heart's longing desire after holiness; He knows the heart's difficulties: "the weakness of our mortal nature." But an honest heart may be satisfied with this thought of God's knowledge, and will be content to say, "Lord, Thou knowest all my desire; and my groaning is not hid from Thee." (Ps. xxxviii. 9.) "Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee" (John xxi. 17), and that I desire to have my heart filled with Thy love.

But I grieve to stand in doubt of some of you. "Ye did run well, who hath hindered you?" Why are you slipping back, and growing careless about Sunday, careless about what people think of you, careless about what God thinks of you? You turned over a new leaf, and seemed so happy in serving God instead of that hard master, the devil. Are you tempted to think there can be no harm in giving way just a little? Perhaps you thought to win some friends to go with you in the way to heaven if you yielded to go a little way with them,—just once to the public-house, just now and then a walk on Sunday *instead* of going to church. You thought they would think you so strict if you refused,

and think God's service a hard service if those who served Him were to be denied all pleasure.

Perhaps you have been laughed out of your religion. I know it is very hard to bear a scornful laugh. But, my friends, you are on the edge of a precipice. I pray God to open your eyes before you fall over. You have let Satan get in the thin end of the wedge: take care he does not get entire power over you again. Don't think a little slip does not matter, and you can soon pick yourselves up again. Don't think that because you have slipped, you must go on slipping; that there is no hope now, and you may as well give over trying. You can't get back by yourself, it is true: "we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves;" but this word stands true, and may be true for you, —"He sent from above, He took me, He drew me out of many waters. He delivered me from my strong enemy, and from them which hated me: they were too strong for me; but the Lord was my stay." (Ps. xviii. 16—18.)

In one place—in Africa I think it was—where the poor heathen had learnt from the mission-*aries the* worship of the true God, they found

the comfort of going quietly away to pray to Him who gives "grace to help in every time of need." There was not much quiet or privacy in their homes, and so it came to be a custom for them to go to the forest near, which was hallowed by the voice of prayer and praise. The tread of many feet wore a path to the place in the bush to which they loved to retire to speak to God; but by and by "the praying path" was seen to be overgrown with grass again: the track was scarcely discernible.

The soul that does not pray, does not, cannot prosper; and carelessness and sin troubled that little flock. Sorrowfully they owned the cause of their failure. The overgrown path revealed the secret: they had forgotten to pray, and the great Adversary had taken advantage of their prayerless, defenceless condition. They sought God again diligently with repentant prayer, and He sent forth restoring grace; and thus it came to pass that the state of the path to the bush was an index to the state of their spiritual life. And how is it with you? Perhaps your "praying path" is overgrown, and that is the reason why you are in danger of going back, and

letting Satan get the victory over you, instead of standing firm and strong against all his wiles. Oh, I say to you, "What meanest thou? Arise, and call upon thy God;" cry out to Him, "from the ends of the earth,"—though it be,—"Lead me to the rock that is higher than I. Hold up my goings in Thy paths, that my footsteps slip not."

Don't ever let yourselves be tempted to give over praying, or to listen to the thought, It's no use. If you have a wicked, hard, cold heart, pray, "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me." If you have an unbelieving, doubting heart, pray, "Lord, increase our faith." If you have done wrong and slipped away from God, pray, "Turn thou me, and I shall be turned. Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation." If you can't pray, still cry, "Lord, teach us to pray." If you are in difficulties, and don't know how to pray, still pray, "Show me now Thy way." If you want to be happy in God's love, and to have all your heart's longings satisfied, and yourself calmed in all troubles and perplexities, pray, "Oh, that Thou wouldest bless me indeed:" "I will not *let Thee go* except Thou bless me." Remember

God is more willing to hear than we to pray; and He has it written down for our encouragement, "Ask, and ye shall receive:" "I said not, Seek ye Me in vain."

> "Restraining prayer, we cease to fight:
> Prayer makes the Christian's armour bright;
> And Satan trembles when he sees
> The weakest saint upon his knees."

Many hundreds of years ago an arrow was sent from a bow drawn "at a venture," by "a certain man" commissioned of God to do His work, and piercing through the joints of the harness (or breastplate), it carried the message of death to a wicked king. (1 Kings xxii. 34.)

I am drawing a bow "at a venture," and I trust to hit a mark; but instead of a poisoned arrow dealing death, I trust I send forth a weapon dipped in healing balm. Often have I thought of the flight of that arrow of old, and pleaded that the arrow selected from the quiver of God's Word might pierce through the joints of the harness of some who were wrapping themselves in pride, or carelessness, unbelief, self-righteousness, or sin; and trembled while I thought that the arrow sent forth might deal

death as well as life,—knowing that if the Word spoken does not profit, it only adds to the condemnation. If we study our Bibles carelessly, or with wrong motives, it will be worse for us than if we had never taken the Bible into our hands: for Paul speaks awful words when he says the message of life and reconciliation in Christ Jesus may be the message of death and everlasting destruction if neglected. And as that arrow of old did God's bidding, so have I entreated that He would hold my weak hand as I drew the bow, that so the arrow might do a mighty work for Him, and carry His message—of conviction, of comfort, of pardon, of strength—to the hardened, or the sorrowful, weary, waiting, burdened souls. Barbed may be the arrows of conviction; but they are tipped with love, so that in wounding they heal, if only we allow them to be withdrawn by the tender, skilful hand of the Great Physician, instead of plucking them out and tearing the wound ourselves.

I have to thank Him that He has fulfilled His word: "I will work, and who shall let it?" and that His word has not returned unto Him *void;* but that it has accomplished according to

His good pleasure, and that some have been "born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." And if *some*, why not *all?*

I have always been very thankful for the results of one arrow sent forth in a letter, quite at a venture; and this makes me hope concerning this one. I was almost hopeless then; yet I was impelled to try what I could do, and God guided it, and gave the blessing.

A young man that I had been watching hopefully for some time, suddenly left his work and started on tramp. I could not bear that he should go forth without a word of warning or encouragement, though I felt his leaving thus hurriedly was a bad sign. I discovered where he had got work, and sent a letter after him, with very little idea that it would ever reach him. But, as I said, God guided it, and he received it the very morning he had determined on starting again. In it I pleaded with him not to forget his good resolutions, not to yield to temptation; but, in spite of his sins and misdeeds, to come back to God, and to trust His love and His power. Some weeks after-

ward I had an acknowledgment of it, which rejoiced my heart. That letter had kept him from despair. Through God's mercy it had touched his heart, and encouraged him to hope. He was reduced to the condition of the prodigal son in the far country. He was all but starving as he sat by the roadside to read the words I had sent forth with prayer. God brought his sin to his remembrance; and he said, "I have sinned: I will arise and go to my Father." He found fresh work, and then was not ashamed to own himself on the Lord's side. I have yet his own letter, and one from a Scripture Reader, telling me all about it; and better still, I have a firm hope and persuasion that he is living for God, and that I shall meet him in that land whence our wayward feet can wander no more, for they that enter therein "go no more out."

Another time I "drew a bow at a venture," saying to a young man (whose attentive manner at a Bible reading I had noticed with rejoicing hope), "If God were to send for you to-night, are you ready to go?" Some weeks afterwards I again had an opportunity of speaking to him, *and reminded* him of my question. This time

the answer came quietly, humbly, but prompt and decided. He told me he had not *felt ready* when I first asked him; he could not bear the thought of dying. But God would not let him forget the question, and he had gone home to think, *Why not?* and to pray for pardon; and from that hour he had given himself to God. Very pleasant was it to see his bright earnest look, and feel that he had a "treasure" in "the fear of the Lord," in the love of Jesus, in the sanctifying, strengthening grace of the Holy Spirit; that "the joy of the Lord" was his "strength," and that his joy no man could take from him. His earthly work carried him to a different part of the country; but "I am confident of this very thing,—that He which hath begun the good work in" him "will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."

I repeat my question to you, dear friends: "If God were to send for you to-night, are you ready to go? and if not, *why not?*"

Many have lightly answered, "When my time comes, I suppose I must go." Of course you must: "there is no discharge in that war." But how would you like to go? All unprepared,

shifting about for some readiness at the last moment; or joyfully able to say, with the Cornish miner, "I am ready: in another minute I shall be in heaven"? Blessed is that servant whom his Lord when He cometh or sendeth for him, shall find so living, resting on the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ, that there shall be no hurry of unpreparedness. God give you grace to look the matter in the face honestly, till you have settled the question satisfactorily, and not let you put it by, as the devil would have you, to your soul's peril.

Remember, though I can only draw a bow at a venture and hope not to miss my aim, there are arrows flying abroad, sent forth with unerring precision by the angel of death, at the bidding of God. The arrow is perhaps even now trembling on the string commissioned to strike you down. And what if the message is not only death to the body, but death to the soul, because of opportunities lost, and warnings neglected till it is too late? Can you see the arrow of death speeding toward you, and joyfully say, Not death, but life? A dying youth could comfort *his* sorrowing parents, saying, Don't you cry

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for me. Don't you hear that the blood of the Saviour can wash away all my sins? I feel easy enough: I have no pain, and I know that the Lord will take me to Himself soon. "He asked life of thee, and thou gavest it him; even length of days for ever and ever." Could you so lie down and die?

Oh, that Thou wouldest rend the heavens, that Thou wouldest come down and reveal Thyself to waiting hearts, that the mountains might flow down at Thy presence, that the hard hearts might be broken, that the melting fire of Thy loving Spirit might influence all, that all wills might be bowed in loving allegiance, and that all obstacles might be removed out of the way of the setting up of Thy kingdom, now in all hearts, to their comfort and joy and the glory of Thy great name, and soon visibly over all the world! That it may please Thee speedily to make up the number of Thine elect.

Can I dare hope and believe, that in the day when the Lord maketh up His jewels not one of us who have held converse together on holy things will be wanting? It may be that we may never again all meet together to speak of

God, study His Word, speak to Him in prayer, and sing His praise on earth. God grant that if not, we may severally in our own homes be "hasting unto the day of God," "adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things," "serving the Lord Christ;" "that we may show forth His praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives; by giving up ourselves to His service, and walking before Him in holiness and righteousness all the days of our life;" and that by and by we may all join in the new song, "unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

It remains for us, dear friends, to determine that this shall be so. God willeth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his foolish wicked ways and live. "Turn ye: turn ye! why will ye die?" God willeth to save you. Will you let Him do it? God willeth to pardon, to strengthen and bless you, to give you peace here, and glory hereafter. Look at the references I put down for you, and *search your* Bibles for passages like these.

Isaiah lvi. 17—19; Luke xix. 10; Micah vii. 18, 19; Psalm lxxxix. 19; Psalm lxviii. 28; Ezekiel xxxvi. 25—28; John xiv. 16, 17, and xvii. 24.

Let us pray very much one for another; remembering the fearful case of all who are living without God in the world, *without hope;* remembering the various difficulties that beset the path of every one who sets his face Zionwards; remembering also the precious promises given for our encouragement. Let us plead more for the help, and teaching of the Holy Spirit, that simply receiving Christ Jesus into our heart's love we may live upon Him, in Him, for Him, by Him, knowing that we shall be with Him for ever, when the warfare is accomplished, the victory won: for "who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" His own word is, "They shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand, and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand."

Let us keep close to Jesus, then, crying out, "Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe;" and our hearts shall be rejoiced with the whisper, "Fear thou not, for I am with thee: be not dismayed, for I am thy God. I will strengthen

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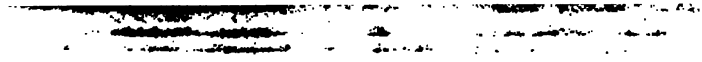

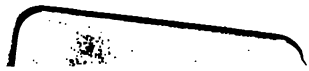

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